

Socials Studies Eductaion: A Tool For Achieving Practical Democracy In Nigeria

Bernedeth Nkiruka Ezegbe
Felicia Nkechi Akubue

Abstract

This paper critically examined the state of the art of Nigerian democracy and how Social Studies education can be used to achieve practical democracy in Nigeria. The paper identified ethnicity, personality clash, unpatriotic leadership and follower ship and other vices as an expression of democratic challenges Nigeria is facing. The issue of political inequality in Nigeria was highlighted. The paper also pointed out that during elections the moral values of the country were neglected, with blatant disregard for cherished norms, rules, and regulations, by competitors whose interest is to win power at all cost. The paper concluded by pointing out that a paradigm shift in Social Studies education will help to effectively inculcate democratic values, social stability, social equality, patriotism and practical knowledge of the rule of law. Achieving the lofty goals of Social Studies education with respect to democratic values is possible because Social Studies as a school discipline houses important democratic topics such as fundamental human rights, civic rights and responsibilities of the citizens as well as issues on nation building. There is need for professional teachers to teach social studies so as to make all these lofty ideas possible.

Social Studies Education: A tool for Achieving Practical Democracy in Nigeria.

Introduction

In Nigeria ethnicity, statism, personality clash, unpatriotic leadership and followership, religion, unemployment, bribery and corruption and a host of other factors are essential expression of democratic challenges confronting the country. These problems in Nigeria polity had long been with us even before political independence in 1960. Ethnicity for instance was a colonial strategy which the colonialists employed to institute negative contradictions between ethnic groups, to help them perpetuate their dominance. It could be noted that ethnic political parties founded in the country by the nationalist leaders “appeared to be an ethnic option in determining a political question over the locus of power” (Igwe, 2006:134). Analyzing the nature of politics in Nigeria, Igwe further states as follows; “...almost every government in Nigeria after the civil war, being themselves products of some forms of ethnicity, have not been able to overcome the contradictions and build a meritocratic democratic system”. Judging from the above assertion, one may rightly say that no true democracy can strive or prevail in a nation where political actors or leaders are propelled and influenced by ethnic sentiment.

Similarly, statism, personality and religion seem to be salient factors in the nation's political process, hence they influence the activities of political actors. This however, negates the basic tenets of democracy. This ugly situation, in one way or the other disenfranchised citizens the democratic and fundamental human rights in all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life.

However, democracy in its true sense operates in line with certain tenets. Tenet simply means the basic of a practice or an idea. It is one of the principles or beliefs that a theory or larger set of beliefs is based on (Wehmeier and Ashby 2001). Hence, tenets of practical democracy may be defined as principles upon which democratic practices in a state are based. According to Onyishi and Ibenekwu (2010:152), within the Nigerian context, the now defunct centre for Democratic Studies articulated in 1990, the universal principles of democracy which the centre intended to entrench in the Nigerian body politics as follows:-

- a. Popular sovereignty (i.e power belongs to the people);
- b. Political equality (i.e. each man has one vote);
- c. Popular consultation (i.e. government does the wishes of the people);
- d. Majority rule and minority rights (i.e. the majority has its way);
- e. The rule of law (i.e. all are equal before the law, due process of law is not impeded, there is not arbitrary rule) and;
- f. Fundamental human rights and basic freedom (i.e the right to life, freedom of association, speech, movement and worship, a free press, etc.

Similarly, Held (1993:20-21) is of the view that a major element of democracy includes:

electd government; free and fair elections in which every citizen's vote has an equal weight; a suffrage which embraces all citizens irrespective of distinctions of race, religion, class, sex and so on; freedom of conscience, information and expression on all public matters broadly defined; the right of all adults to oppose their government and stand for office; and associational autonomy-the right to form independent association including social movements, interest groups and political parties.

Looking at Nigerian democracy, one could say that the above principles or tenets of democracy are hardly maintained in Nigeria. For this reason the researchers were of the opinion that social studies education by its very nature could offer solution to Nigerian's sick democracy, hence it is a course that tries to instill into the recipients desirable attitudes, norms and values that would help to solve the problems of human society for peaceful co-existence.

Based on the fore-going this study is therefore organized under the following subheading: Nigeria Democracy-state of the Art, Social Studies Education for Democratic values, Conclusion and Recommendation.

Nigerian Democracy, state of the Art:

The democratic dispensation truly speaking is one which is characterized by the strict observation of the principles of democracy.

Judging from the above premise, one may rightly say that, it seems that in Nigerian democracy, power does not belong to the people. A case in point is the scheduled 2003 local government elections in one of the state which rather turned out to be a selection of chairmen by the Governor whose purported election were perfected by Enugu State Independent Electoral Commission (ENSIEC) (Onyishi and Ibenekwu, 2010:158). Onyishi and Ibenekwu, further lamented that in Enugu State under the arrangement mentioned above, election/selection was conducted into the original constitutional seventeen council areas, then the outright appointment of chairmen, councilors, supervisors for the rest of the development centers were made by the Governor.

A critical look at the above situation shows that Nigeria democracy seems to be a place where the people are given what the government in power thinks they (people) need and not really what the people need as it suppose to be in a practical democracy like that of the USA and other civilized countries of the world. What explains the situation better is what Ezeozue (2001:158) states about representative government in the following lines:

Representative government is thus a compromise between two ideals; the first, an effective and strong government which gives the people what it thinks is good for them, and not necessarily what they themselves want; and second, a government which is based on the idea that people should have what they themselves want, even at the cost of speed, efficiency and consistency of policy.

Any polity that functions on democratic principles cannot afford to display antithetical tendencies to the basis of democracy as a socio-political and economic institution (Awa, 1987).

Regrettably, in Nigeria today, elections seem to go with un-imaginable frauds and or malpractices; voting is hijacked and voters intimidated by the thugs hired by the seeming corrupt politicians who see political offices as their birthrights. Nwokolo (2010:23) laments, “in Nigeria, elections is neither free nor fair, nor do the votes of the electorates determine who occupies what offices as reported widely by the mass media”. During elections in Nigeria, the moral values of the country are corrupted by the blatant disregard for the cherished rules, norms and regulations by competitors obsessed with winning power at all cost. The actions of our corrupt politicians, political leaders and/or electorates, negates the rule of law.

The rule of law is theory/tenet of democracy that advocates that no-body is above the law of the state, that the law is not a respecter of any person no matter his rank or position, that law gives equal treatment to all irrespective of sex, religion, creed or background. However, in Nigeria, some people seem to be above the law. This means that law has no effect on them. It is in line with this democratic anomalies that Obianyo, (2002:2012) states that, “in Africa, there are many indications to show that some people especially the governing class are above the law; they contravene the law with reckless abandon and without fear of reprisals from law enforcement agencies”. This accounts for why some moves seem to have been made towards removing the immunity clause from

the Nigerian constitution for it seems to be the protector of some callous leaders of the country.

The rape of Nigerian democracy seems to be so open and with impunity. It seems to be a history in Nigerian election(s) that popular voice of the people cannot be reckoned with. The annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election which was said to be the freest and fairest election to have been conducted in post – independent Nigeria is a true picture of electoral injustice in Nigerian democracy (Akinboye and Anifowose, 2005). Akinboye and Anifowose add that the annulment reinforced the contention that there existed a Northern Oligarchy ready at all times to resist any shift of power away from the North. Is this not the drama in Nigerian democracy, since Goodluck Jonathan mounted the podium of leadership in 2011? Although the election was not constitutionally annulled, some key political charlatans in the North have continued to sponsor movements that could sabotage smooth running of Nigerian democracy, hence, the furious emergence of a religious sect called Boko Haram has continued to take laws into their own hands, eliminating lives and destroying property up North. This shows that the Nigerian democracy has a lot of challenges.

In a democracy, the Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms of the citizens need to be protected and respected. Democracy is committed to ensuring that certain basic rights are guaranteed in practical terms, not just on paper, to every citizen (Jafaru and Okam, 2012). These basic rights which citizens ought to enjoy in a democracy include;

Right to life; right to dignity of human person; right to personal liberty; right to fair hearing right to private and family life; right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; right to freedom of expression and the press; right to peaceful assembly and association; right to freedom of movement; right to freedom from discrimination; right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria; compulsory acquisition of property; restriction on and derogation from fundamental rights; special jurisdiction of High Court and Legal aid (FRN, 2011:vi)

Our concern in this discourse is to what extent do citizens of Nigeria enjoy the aforementioned basic rights? As at the time of this study, right to life of Nigerian citizens in some parts of the country seems to be seriously neglected and tampered with. The rate at which Boko Haramists play with the lives and property of Nigerians up North is alarming. True democratic value perhaps is a solution to a peaceful change, human and societal development. The practice of true democracy is the soul of any enduring and perhaps, it remains the hallmark of societal civilization (Kokori, 2007).

To say that a country is a democratic, there must be the practice of equality of all citizens, people's needs will be attended to by the government, the rule of law must be respected, election must be free and fair, the leaders must be supervised by the people to find out whether they lead well and the leaders must enjoy legitimacy. These features exist in Nigerian democracy in the theory but lack in practice.

Nigeria is a country with a history of electoral fraud and wholesome malpractices (Kokori, 2007). Kokori further points out those recent elections conducted

since this nascent democracy in 1999, 2003, and 2007 were all fraught with monumental election malpractices. The most recent presidential election that was held in 2011, even though it was certified to be free and fair; there were many legal wars after the election to the level that the tribunals were stalked with a lot of federal, state and local election cases. In a true practical democracy, the votes of the people determine the winner of an election. Regrettably since our pre-independence elections in Nigeria, our situations have grown more pathetic from little election errors of some few cases of double voting reported in our first elections to a position where figures are simply manufactured, configured and simply announced as election results (Kokori, 2007).

Nigerian democracy seems not to be observing in practice the principles of a true/practical democracy. Because of this imperfections in the practice of democracy the country has continued to reap low dividend in their gross domestic product (GDP) and per capital income, experience infrastructural decay across the country, the labour market is saturated with hundreds of Thousands of unemployed university and non university graduates. However, Nigeria, should not fold her arms watching her democracy crumble, but should do something since every country of the world is going democratic.

This is why this study believes that social studies education is a potential tool capable to help achieve democratic values that will help the nation practice true democracy.

Social Studies Education for Democratic Values

Social Studies Education as a programme of study has the power to instill in the recipient the knowledge, skills, values and attitude that would help him interact meaningfully, effectively and co-operatively in his social and physical environment. Its philosophy is largely based on maintenance of the fundamental values of a democratic society. "Its main aim is to improve the processes by which citizens use knowledge from the social sciences and other areas of disciplined thought in making decision concerning their individual behavior and also concerning question of public policy". (Okam, 2012: 33).

The dynamic nature of social studies has made the Federal Government of Nigeria (FRN 2004) to accredit it as one of the core-curriculum subjects with the hope that by its value laden nature it would help to produce effective citizens with relevant skills and values that would help them contribute their quota to the development of Nigerian nation. Implicit in the above assertion is the fact that social studies education programmes if properly implemented will help a great deal the inculcation of democratic value in the youths, hence; its primary goal is in congruent with the nation's educational goals, among which is the inculcation of the right type of value and attitude for the survival of individual and the Nigerian society (FRN, 2004:7).

Many Social Studies academics, researchers and institutes, National Teachers Institute (NTI 2007), and Okam (2012) were of the opinion that Social Studies education in Nigerian did not achieve its objectives. Socio-political, economic, religious and cultural problems inherent in Nigerian state attested to this fact. Okam, (2012) blame

this ugly scenario on the caliber of teachers employed to teach the course in our school system when he succinctly states as follows:

These teachers are not committed to the successful implementation of curriculum programmes in Social Studies education because they lack most of the qualities which characterize good professional teachers of the subject. These teachers could display ignorance and lack of necessary skills as to what it takes to cultivate the following principles and attributes:

- a. The need for continued professional regeneration through continuous learning and participation in professional life;
- b. a command of the subject matter and curriculum content of the subject and the ability to communicate these clearly;
- c. ability to utilize effectively a variety of teaching methodologies and resources;
- d. the need to demonstrate what it takes to be 'pleasant', 'kind', 'tolerant', 'sympathetic', 'friendly', 'patient', 'caring', 'humorous', 'loving', and 'humble'....
- e. the need to display understanding and consideration for the learners, their interests and biogenic and socio-cultural differences; and
- f. the need to display self-control and self discipline(Okam, 2012:18-19)

Practical democracy in Nigeria can be achieved through social studies education if only the professional teachers in the area handle the subject properly. As a problem approach discipline, only professional teachers who are groomed in the ideals and philosophy intrinsic in social studies education can effectively inculcate the skills and values into the youths who in turn will manifest true democratic values for better Nigeria. This is because, "teacher factor" has been conceptualized as a major source of failure in the process of utilizing social studies education as a curriculum design for inculcating our national values amongst students for human development in our schools and colleges (Okam, 2012).

Conclusion

A paradigm shift in social studies education will bring about democratic values enhancement, social stability, social equality, patriotism, and practical knowledge of the rule of law. Fundamental human rights and other key principles of democracy for the restoration of the seeming pseudo democracy in Nigeria can also be achieved.

Recommendations

- (1) In the schools the teaching of social studies should be made more practical; at the mean time it is more theoretical than practical. If students were given practical social studies education from primary school to University level, Nigerians low value system as regards to democracy would change. This is because, Social Studies as a course houses important democratic topics like the fundamental human

rights of the citizens in a state, peace education, citizens' duties and obligations and a host of other nation-building topics. Secondly the school is an agent of social change and could bring about favourable changes if properly utilized. Therefore, we may say that the theoretical way in which social studies is taught in Nigeria contributes to low peoples orientation on how to maintain and live by the principles of practical democracy.

- (2) The teachers of social studies at all levels of education in Nigeria should be people who major in the course either at National Certificate of Education (NCE), or bachelors degree (B.ED, BSc. Ed) and post graduate (PG) levels, so that the inculcation of democratic practices in the young people will be made more practical and effective. Social studies and key units in it when well taught by a professional teacher can help build in students outstanding character that will help them interact well with people within the polity, have patriotic feelings and think more of what they will do for the country. Okam (2012) emphatically states, that only professional teachers of social studies education can achieve instructional effectiveness in the subject.
- (3) More topics that will help give students knowledge of the principles of practical democracy should be incorporated in the social studies curricula at all levels. Again, extension of social studies curriculum to senior secondary level will be of great help as it will help to widen the scope of the subject. This repositioning of the social studies education will bring about true democratic value on the youth who will help Nigeria enjoy an ideal democracy.

Reference

- Akinboye, S.O. and Anifowose, R. (2005). Nigerian government and politics. In R. Anifowose and I. Enemuo (Eds), *Elements of politics*. Lzgos: Sam/roanusi.
- Awa, E. O. (1987). *Issues in federalism*. Benin City: Ethiope
- Ezeozue, C. (2001). *Governments: forms and system*. In D.I. Ajaegbo and E.O. Ibezim, *Citizenship education in Nigeria: An interdisciplinary approach*. Onitsha: West and Solomon.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette. (2011). Constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria (as amended) with the national industrial court. Signed 4th March 2011.
- Held, D. (1993), *Prospects for democracy: North, South, East, West* Cambridge: Polity press.
- Igwe, O (2006). Power and Politics in Nigeria. In J. Okpala and M.B. Adeyemi. *Fundamentals of Social Studies for Universities*. Nsukka: Prize Publishers Ltd. 126-139.
- Jafaru, A.J. and Okam, C.C. (2012). Democratic governance for nation-building and national development in Nigeria. *A journal of the Social studies Association of Nigeria*, 15 (2), 110-132.
- Kokori, F. (2007). Democracy in Nigeria, the journey So far. *A paper presented at the Benin National Merit Award on 29 December, 2007 at the Benin Museum Hall, Benin City – Nigeria*.

- National Teachers' Institute (2007). Manual for the re-training of primary school teachers Social Studies. A millennium development goals project (MDG) April 2007.
- Nwokolo, P.N. (2010). Media images of Nigeria democratic elections and their influence on the Nigerian electorate (2003 and 2007). *Review of Education Institute of Education Journal, University of Nigeria, Nsukka*, 21 (2), 19 -33.
- Obianyo, N. (2002): Government and its classifications. In P.N., Chikendu (Ed) *Introduction to political science*. Enugu: Academic printing press.
- Okafor, J.C. (1999). Political representation, peoples will and sustainable democracy in Nigeria. *Journal of Arts and Social Sciences Forum*, 2 (8),
- Okam, C.C. (2012). Needed Paradigm shift for Repositioning Social Studies Education to meet vision 20-2020 challenges in Nigeria. *Nigeria Journal of Social Studies* 15 (2). 15 – 41.
- Onyishi, A O. Ibenekwu, I.E. (2010). Work ethnics and local government administration in a democratic setting. In E.J., Otagburuagu, I.E., Ibenekwu and E. Iwundu (eds), *Governance at the grassroots*. Enugu: Benak ventures.